

## Playing Pac-Man in Portville: Policing the Dilution and Fragmentation of Drug Importations through Major Seaports

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**Playing Pac-Man in Portville:  
Policing the Dilution and Fragmentation of Drug Importations through Major  
Seaports**

**Abstract**

This paper presents findings of a qualitative research project into organised crime, policing and security across five major seaports, ‘Portvilles’: Genoa (Italy); Melbourne (Australia); Montreal (Canada); New York (USA) and Liverpool (UK).

Through content analysis of confidential judicial files, the paper will construct the offenders’ scenarios and options to import drugs in Portville. Through also interviewees with law enforcement agencies, police forces and security staff in these seaports the paper presents policing and security struggles to disrupt importations. The main finding is that importation roles and security techniques change constantly and quickly, as in a game of Pac-Man. Security and policing in seaports lead to the *dilution* and *fragmentation* of drug importation, while only distribution tends to remain organised in Portville. In this chaotic environment, it is more the rules of trade that affect the success of drug importations the most rather than the failures of effective security and policing.

**Keywords:** drug importation; drug trade; seaport; maritime security; policing.

## Introduction

Cross-border drug trafficking has been object of several studies (Zaitch, 2005; Hughes et al, 2019) and it does not seem that the phenomenon has been decreasing in recent years (UNODC, 2019). Drug trafficking is a package-crime including different activities, which have been often studied as market-based offences (Beare and Naylor, 1999). Much like a legal market, drug trafficking involves multilateral exchanges of goods across a number of actors and intermediaries – producers, brokers, importers, distributors, and consumers. Even though illicit drugs are indeed commodities that are dependent on economic rules of their own market, actors are often located in different countries: different socio-political contexts will affect the success or failure of the whole package-crime.

Depending on the type of drug, different drug shipment methods are employed: car, trucks, airplanes, SUVs, yachts and small/personal vessels, and also commercial boats, including containers in large cargo ships, into main ports. Different smugglers will have their preferred methods of trafficking. However, it is obvious that the world container traffic has immensely changed the nature of legal commerce, as much as it has illegal traffics through seaports (Nordstrom, 2007). Even though air transport now covers a large portion of international shipping, sea shipping still remains a very effective way to move large amounts of cargos cross border (Hummel, 2007).

Ports are unique environments, universes of processes and meanings, border zones, transit areas, ontologically always in flux, cores of their cities', regions' and nations' economic and political processes and investments (Brewer, 2014; Eski, 2016). The flow of commodities and services, between and across national jurisdictions

through the main seaports, inevitably leaves some unregulated areas, as it is impossible to completely control and regulate seawaters.

Understanding the social and economic underpinnings of organised crime in the form of drug trafficking across borders has been a priority for the international community for the past two decades, especially since the 2000 UN convention on transnational organised crime was signed in Palermo, Italy and after 9/11 (Sergi, 2017). Indeed, securing borders is a challenge of today's world concerned with the safety of citizens as well as the security of infrastructure within national boundaries. The landscape of maritime security, as well, has changed drastically, together with all the other security threats after 9/11 (Eski and Carpenter, 2013). To this end, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in 2002 approved the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code by adding Chapter XI.2 (Special measures to enhance maritime security) to the SOLAS (Safety of Life at Sea) Convention of 1974. The ISPS in 2019 applies to 165 SOLAS members accounting for over 99% of world tonnage<sup>1</sup>, thus creating an appearance of harmonisation of security policies across states. The Code contains a mandatory Part A outlining detailed maritime and port security-related requirements, which SOLAS contracting governments, port authorities and shipping companies must adhere to, while Part B of the Code provides a series of recommendatory guidelines on how to meet the requirements of Part A<sup>2</sup>. As indicated, ports are gateways and marine borders, and therefore they are crucial spaces in any strategic effort to secure transit, entry, and exit, in and out of states. For this reason, maritime security has been developing along the lines of policing of other security

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<sup>1</sup>See <http://www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/StatusOfConventions/Pages/Default.aspx> and <http://www.imo.org/en/About/Conventions/StatusOfConventions/Documents/StatusOfTreaties.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/Guide\\_to\\_Maritime\\_Security/Pages/SOLAS-XI-2%20ISPS%20Code.aspx](http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Security/Guide_to_Maritime_Security/Pages/SOLAS-XI-2%20ISPS%20Code.aspx)

threats, including terrorism and organised crime, especially illicit trafficking (Zhang and Roe, 2019; Brewer, 2014).

## Research Notes

This paper will present some of the findings of a larger research project into organised crime, policing and security carried out across five major ports: Genoa (Italy); Melbourne (Australia); Montreal (Canada); New York (USA) and Liverpool (UK). All of these cities will be ‘Portville’ in this paper, to indicate the applicability of some of the findings to all locations. The existence of convergences across these ports does not exclude the persistence of important divergences as well. These divergences will need to be explained a well, by referring to the relationship between the space of the port and its surrounding areas, which is likely to influence policing as well as urban developments. The main research questions that this paper is exploring are:

1. What are the mechanisms, aims and known strategies of importing drugs into, or through, the ports?
2. What are the reactions and tactical choices and perceptions of law enforcement and security authorities on the vulnerabilities of ports to organised crime with specific attention to drug importation?

Data included, primarily, juridical data collected through national databases (portals such as Westlaw UK, ItalCass, Pacer, Austlii, Canlii) as well as investigative files shared (and often anonymised) with the author by different authorities interviewed in the course of this project. Press releases and official policy documents have been

gathered and also have guided the collection of case law for specific/additional cases. For each port, interviews and focus groups (for a total of over 50 meetings) have been arranged with port authorities in their security teams, police forces in their port units (such as Trident Task Force in Victoria, Australia or the Guardia di Finanza in Genoa port or the Port Police in Liverpool), regional, state and federal police units for organised crime (as applicable, such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Port Enforcement Team and Border Integrity for Quebec, the City of Montreal Police, Merseyside Police, and the Direzione Investigativa Antimafia) and Port Facility Security Officers (PFSO) working at the ports and terminal containers (private companies), border forces (e.g. the Agenzia delle Dogane, Australian and British Border Force) and other waterfront control agents (such as the Waterfront Commission for New York Harbour). Even considering the differences across states and jurisdictions, Portville usually has the following authorities with different mandates/functions over the port:

Type of authority	Main Task
Terminal Security Teams/Port Police	Usually private sector security firms, tasked with daily security duties; access monitoring; traffic monitoring; ensuring of flawless movements of goods and services; ‘keeping the peace’ role.
Port Authorities Security units	Approval and implementation of security protocols, as per national and

	international obligations; monitoring and training of port security officers.
Municipal/Local/ Investigative teams	Community policing; Investigation, prevention and repression of general crime happening in the port; knowledge of the city's criminal landscape and how it spills over to the port.
Regional/Provincial Police/ Investigative teams	Intelligence-led policing of serious/organised crime groups in the area; knowledge of drug markets in the city and the region/province; targeted operations based on intelligence at the port.
State/National/Regional/Federal Police Investigative teams	National and Cross-Border intelligence-led investigations into organised crime groups and drug trafficking 'jobs'; data collection and intelligence-building capacities to identify targets in the port.
Customs and Border Agencies	Risk assessments and duty checks; antifraud squads; access to port terminals for opening/screening of containers; mix of law enforcement and border control duties.

Interviews have covered security plans inside the port terminals/authorities; national and international regulations for access and monitoring of the port; perceptions of illegal activities in the ports; assessments of risks and vulnerabilities, perceptions of efficiency in responses. Some of these forces have shared some of their (often confidential, thus anonymised) protocols to detect and investigate vulnerabilities and organised crime or importation at the port. These cannot be directly quoted due to confidentiality restrictions.

Much of what was discussed with interviewees does not relate to this paper. This paper should instead be considered as an attempt to understand how drug importers' choice respond to, and adapt, to the implementation of security procedures in and around the ports, and how this might affect options for the illicit drug trade. As indicated, some authorities have requested that certain data, including parts of interviews/focus groups, be kept confidential. For this reason, the analysis in this paper will present likely scenarios rather than case studies; it will refer to Portville, rather than specific areas, to avoid direct attributions; it will engage in an analytical and policy-oriented exercise, rather than a reporting one. The main aim is to show similarities and convergences that the author has been able to observe throughout the analysis of data in the different ports enough to build likely scenarios, which are generalisable precisely because they are the amalgamation of various sources of data. This is true for both the description of offenders' strategies – largely based on the analysis of investigative files and judicial case law, including wiretap transcripts – and for policing and security responses – mostly based on the interviews and focus groups.

To facilitate comprehension, findings will be presented in a confrontational perspective: on one side the offenders' scenarios and choices to import drugs in



Portville, on the other side the reactions, perceptions and struggles of law enforcement to disrupt importations.

The main findings of this paper are: a) illicit trafficking is limited by licit trading routes in and out of ports; b) while drug importation is often a disorganised and opportunistic activity, distribution in Portville, is often a “closed game”, thus more organised and difficult for newcomers to exploit; c) increasing security measures displace certain activities, but also create further opportunities for offending; and d) unpredictability of control activities and less formal compliance requirements over ports might yield extra knowledge of, and impact upon, drug importation mechanisms for law enforcement. Mainly, this paper argues that major seaports act as *breakwaters* for drug importation: they create obstacles and force importers to adapt and modify their behaviours; they support the *dilution* and *fragmentation* of this type of criminality. In this sense, the game between importers and police forces is a game of Pac-Man, where new obstacles or facilitators emerge suddenly, roles change, directions change, in a cat and mouse game that requires adaptability and flexibility on both sides. In this chaotic environment, it is more the rules of trade that affect the success of drug importations the most, rather than the failures of effective security and policing.

### **Organised crime and drug trafficking on the waterfront**

Throughout the literature on organised crime, ports are virtually always mentioned as key entry points for drugs and other illegal goods, but also as areas of influence of more sophisticated groups, who aim at governing spaces and not just

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profiting from them, such as mafia-type groups exercising labour racketeering in the port workers' unions (Jacobs, 2011; Jacobs, 2006; Sergi, 2019; Calderoni, 2012; Hughes et al., 2019; Eski, 2011; Jacobs and Peters, 2003). The term 'organised crime' includes a number of different illegal activities including trafficking and smuggling - of drugs, weapons, human beings, counterfeit products, protected wildlife, waste, stolen goods – but also laundering money through investments in the legal economy, i.e in construction companies or other services that, for example, can be also needed in port environments. Organised crime refers both to mafia-type groups which are also concerned with power-seeking and governance establishment (Sergi, 2017; Varese, 2011), as much as to profit-making groups activities that act as facilitator on the docks too. For the purposes of this research, organised crime will mostly refer to serious criminality, by different types of networked actors, involving the provision and distribution of illicit goods, such as trafficking and importation of drugs, tobacco and counterfeit goods. When it comes to ports, drug trafficking is the type of organised crime that has been, directly or often indirectly, mostly investigated by academia including scholars of organised crime, policing and network analysis (Eski, 2019; Eski, 2016; Brewer, 2014; Madsen, 2018).

One of the first studies on the manifestations and mechanisms of drug trafficking at the global and local level within ports, is an ethnographic investigation of Colombian traffickers in the Netherlands in late 1990s by Zaitch (2002b). He argued that traffickers welcomed the revolution occurring in cargo shipments through containers, as it multiplied the amount of goods shipped worldwide and made certain ports essentially 'super-ports', with large amount of traffic and therefore a dispersal of risks in the process. This book showed how to a privileged access to the narcotic in Colombia

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4 corresponded a proliferation of small, decentralised and informal groups, more flexible  
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6 than it was/is commonly believed. The figures of 'brokers' managing transactions and  
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8 moving across different networks are the key players, especially for the business of  
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10 importation to another country, such as the Netherlands. One thing that emerged clearly  
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12 from Zaitch's (2002a) research is that increasing amount of traffic through containers in  
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14 large ports, paired with the fragmentation and disorganised nature of trafficking units  
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16 and networks from source countries, decreases the risks of detection at the destination  
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18 port. More traffic, essentially, means less risk because of decreased probability of  
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20 random border checks (Zaitch, 2002a; Smith, 2017). This concept has been confirmed  
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22 up until contemporary days by research into Mexican cartels (Payan, 2016).  
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27 To a certain extent, this is also confirmed by economic analyses of transnational  
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29 trafficking that have focused on the fundamental inequality among participants in the  
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31 trade, between source and destination countries. Drug trafficking, especially cocaine, is  
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33 characterised by an economy of scale, in which production costs are negligible when  
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35 compared to retail prices (Reuter, 1983; Reuter and Kleiman, 1986; Reuter and  
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37 Greenfield, 2001). There is, indeed, a difference between the drivers and the gains of  
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39 drug traffickers and those of drug importers, which arguably mirror in the policing  
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41 efforts at source and destination countries. It has been argued that organised crime, and  
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43 especially drug trafficking, is indeed disorganised, as it is the liberal market, rather than  
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45 just individuals' skills and choices, that determine survival and failures (Reuter, 1983).  
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50 In contemporary days, Western states consider the disruption of drug trafficking  
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52 as paramount for border integrity, in addition to the harm drugs might cause to public  
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54 health and public order (Andreas, 2003). Policing the waterfront is another one of those  
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56 fields that has been securitised, within counter-terrorism and counter-insurgence  
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4 agendas (Eski and Carpenter, 2013). A border is considered secure if drugs cannot get  
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6 through or get confiscated when they arrive. However, free trade might both undermine  
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8 as well as enhance the drug interdiction capabilities of a state (Bartilow and Eom,  
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10 2009). Indeed, a security paradox has emerged in the realm of serious criminality (Di  
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12 Ronco and Sergi, 2019). On one side, security becomes synonymous of control and  
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14 prevention, but the more attempts of control the more security risks emerge: non-  
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16 compliance with demands of security becomes almost like a criminal act. The port  
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18 security zone is not different (Eski, 2019). On one side maritime security demands the  
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20 collection of more and more data to control vulnerabilities emerging from port  
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22 employees, custom officers and from traders (Eski, 2019; Côté-Boucher, 2016). On the  
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24 other side, such demands can become new opportunities for deviance (Clarke and  
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26 Brown, 2003). In addition, expectations of smooth and fast trading have essentially put  
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28 under pressure demands for the speediness of security responses (Brewer, 2014; Eski,  
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30 2016; Cowen, 2007). Indeed, maritime security is often still perceived as a cost and not  
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32 as a resource for traders. Private actors or firms deliver security on the front line of the  
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34 docks while their employers, private companies owning the terminal spaces, aim at  
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36 boosting their productivity (Eski, 2019).  
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43 The environment of a port is naturally a border zone: on one side there are open  
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45 waters, on the other side the port also intersects with urban life and the economy of the  
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47 cities and regions behind. While border integrity is concerned with global and cross-  
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49 border issues such as drug trafficking and importation, at the local level criminality at  
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51 the port includes other activities, more or less serious and more or less linked to forms  
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53 of organised criminality: these could include the movement and management of drugs  
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55 before distribution once they reach the port (Zaitch, 2002a); cargo theft and theft from  
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containers (Ekwall, 2009); labour racketeering and protection rackets run by organised crime groups willing to maintain exclusivity, control and a degree of order and governance over the port's criminal activities (Jacobs, 2014; Demeri, 2012). The diversification of criminal activities in the port - more or less linked to organised crime or having illicit trafficking as end game - ranges from local to global and calls for a diversification of policing techniques and authorities. Various institutions have their eyes on ports, from port police forces to city police agencies, from security firms to federal/national institutions. The security and policing landscape of ports is therefore built on multi-agency cooperation, as the natural answer to the challenging task that is policing the waterfront (Brewer, 2014; Eski, 2016).

### **Looking for doors: the chaotic game of drug importation into seaports**

In order to complete a drug importation - a 'job' - *"you need a door"*. This is what authorities at different levels have repeated at every stage of this research and also mirrors the language that importers used in wiretapped conversation. Across judicial cases and narratives shared by security and law enforcement agencies in the different ports visited, drug importation - the 'job' - through the port in 'Portville' – might occur in one of the scenarios described below. Because of the nature of these scenarios – which are reconstructions based on different cases – and the confidentiality of some of the data, the author cannot provide direct quotes in this section. However, the scenarios will use language and examples directly found in the cases, as much as applicable. There is a certain degree of correspondence between the judicial cases, police narratives

(that often form judicial cases) and offenders' language as emerging from surveillance and wiretapped conversations also included in the judicial data. However, it is fundamental to remember that certain judicial narratives are constructed for the specific aim of prevailing at trials over adversarial narratives. An analysis based on such narratives must, therefore, acknowledge this limitation and always consider that this might very well be a partial account of reality.

The names of these scenarios (pizza delivery and pizza pick-up) were inspired to a conversation had with a federal police officer in Canada, while he was explaining the different techniques employed in two cases we were discussing. The author is grateful to him as these names perfectly encapsulate the language of judicial documents and wiretaps in different cases gathered.

Sam is based in Portville and wants to import cocaine or methamphetamines or hashish (main drugs shipped through seaports, UNODC 2019). S/he makes initial contacts in Portville that can help with distribution and selling of the drugs as long as s/he manages to import them. Each Portville will be organised differently in terms of who, and where in town, arranges distribution and selling.

**A. Before the job** the main issues are a) to secure a contact at the source country or with a broker in another country who will source the drugs and b) to finance the job.

#### 1) *The Pizza Delivery Option*

- a) Sam resorts to a broker Joey in Portville who is able to offer a whole service, from trafficking in the source country to delivery. Much like a pizza delivery, Sam has to wait for it and agree payment methods.

- b) Sam does roughly know that the broker will liaise with a Mexican cartel who is sourcing the cocaine from Colombian producers or with an Australian broker who will source methamphetamines from Myanmar through Thailand.
- c) Sam relinquishes control over the importation – drugs will go through transit countries depending on trafficking routes for the commodity chosen. S/he needs to later arrange for distribution, after transport and storage have been taken care of.
- d) This option will cost Sam more, but will reduce his/her risk of being caught.
- e) Depending on Sam's background, reputation and availability of cash, payment might be either deferred to completion of delivery or split in two halves, before and after completion, to cover for the possibility of 'losing' the shipment in transit or due to police or custom detection.

## 2) *The Pizza Pick-Up Option*

- a) Sam has his/her own contact either with a broker in Mexico (or Cambodia or Australia) or directly with producers and traffickers in Colombia (or in Thailand or Myanmar) and reaches an agreement over a certain amount of cocaine to be shipped to Portville. In this case, Sam orders the pizza and has to arrange pick-up himself/herself.
- b) Sam's first problem is to arrange the shipment of the commodity and secure safe transactions with one or both his/her suppliers through source and/or transit countries.
- c) Sam's second problem is to finance the operation, thus making sure s/he has enough seed money or a clear plan of payment on demand after distribution.

- d) Sam needs to be ready for the delivery (or deliveries) and arrange distribution upon arrival, including transport and storage of the narcotics outside the port.
- e) This option might cost less than the previous one: money is to be paid to the traffickers and the brokers. However, it includes arranging different other tasks and actively participating in the delivery.
- f) Depending on Sam's availability of cash, his/her own networks and reputation and his/her own ability to connect with a good high distribution network, the job will be more or less successful.

**B. During the job** the main issues are about logistics of transport.

1) *The Pizza Delivery Option*

- a) Sam does not necessarily know how Joey is going to import the narcotics s/he has bought.
- b) Joey has knowledge of the details of the shipment(s), the container(s) number and the arrival date(s) of the ship at the Terminal X.
- c) Joey needs to make sure that the drugs hidden in the container(s) make it safely outside the port. Joey has a couple of options:
  - i) Paying a 'user fee' to another network/individual who can offer logistical and/or human support on the docks. These networks/individuals are usually known in the underworld circles in Portville – they can offer manpower, protection against theft and/or vehicles as needed. This option allows for a more integrated relation with the city's underworld that has benefits (protection and success of the job especially in case of further jobs) as well



as disadvantages (payment for extra services and possibilities of retaliation over turf/business/commodity protection).

- ii) Or by arranging for legitimate transport – i.e. by concealing the shipment of the drugs within a cargo ordered by a legitimate company. This involves using freight forwarders, willingly or unwillingly aware of the content of the container(s) they will be transporting out of the port to a given location for storage/stocking.

## 2) *The Pizza Pick-Up Option*

- a) Sam will receive a call/text/message that 150 kg of cocaine (the first part of a larger order or the whole delivery) is arriving at Terminal X in Portville on the Carolina Star ship, in container AB1234567 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, next Friday. S/he will receive instructions on where/how to find the drugs within the container.
- b) Sam has probably already contacted someone s/he knows at the port - or someone who knows someone at the port - in order to understand what is needed to either open the container at the port or take the container out of the port.
  - i) If the drugs can be accessed by opening the container in what is known as ‘the rip-off’ method<sup>3</sup>, Sam’s best bet would be to outsource the work on the docks to a network of individuals who are known in Portville as able to provide logistical and human support. They can, for example, force the seal and replace it after taking the narcotics. By paying a ‘user fee’ to them, the job will be completed during a specific shift (of a port employee/worker), so

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<sup>3</sup> The “rip-off system” is a concealment methodology whereby a legitimate shipment via a container is exploited to smuggle contraband (particularly cocaine) from the country of origin or the transshipment port to the country of destination. In “rip-off” cases, neither the shipper nor the consignee is aware that their shipment is being used to smuggle illicit cargo (UNODC website definition)

that an extra set of eyes can also protect the container when the ship docks, depending on how easily/quickly/safely the container can be moved by the insider in the terminal. This will make sure a) there are no thefts, and b) the authorities are not checking the container.

- ii) If the first option is not available then Sam might want to arrange directly for freight forwarders - through a shipping company's contract - to get the container (seemingly) legally outside of the port. This option might be immediately cheaper and safer, but it also requires an assessment of risks on the legal businesses employed not to alert taxation and anti-corruption authorities.

**C. After the job** the main issue is to arrange distribution.

*1. The Pizza Delivery Option*

- a. Joey will need to deliver the drugs to Sam, so that payment can be completed to himself/herself and to the traffickers, depending on the initial deal. Delivery is likely to happen outside of the port, in a storage facility where the container / the drugs have been moved by trucks or another vehicle.
- b. Sam will arrange for a delivery also suitable to his/her high-level distribution network, if s/he is not in charge of distribution himself/herself.

*2. The Pizza Pick-Up Option*

- a. Sam needs to complete the job by arranging the high-level distribution once the drugs are out of the port, to then pay traffickers/brokers and the user fees for the port – which might differ depending on what ‘service’ s/he used.
- b. Before final delivery to distributors, Sam (and the facilitators at the port) might decide to wait before transporting the container outside the port to be sure that police or customs do not have any lead, or are not monitoring, the container, thus ‘extra eyes’ (and extra money) might be needed on the docks.
- c. This last passage might also require extra corruption, i.e. of custom or police agents or port employees.

### ***Other variables***

It is highly likely that distribution networks in Portville might end up handling drugs not arriving from the main port in the city, but from others doors, including other ports, more or less close to the city. Once an importer buys from a trafficker, the shipment might not necessarily be on demand, but it might arrive in an apparently disorderly way, at a different space, time and quantity, per single shipment. If I buy 500 kgs of cocaine I might receive 2 cargos of 250 kgs each in two moments over the next three months. Shipments might also use different doors, depending on variables at the source country too. There might be the possibility to place the narcotics in a container on a boat that takes a certain route. The boat might also have characteristics for which it can only dock in specific deep waters. In this case the *door* might indeed be another port

or a specific terminal in the same port that has the right requirements. For example, this the case between the port of Vado Ligure close to Genoa, or the terminal PSA Genova Prà in Genoa, compared to others in Genoa, or the port of Halifax compared to the port of Montreal, as interviewees have indicated. Indeed, a safer (i.e. less patrolled) journey by sea – with a less controlled route – might justify using another port, even one that is far away. A trafficker or an importer might prefer using a port in another region/province or even state and then transport the drugs by car for 5 days or a week, if the door in the other port is safer than any other door to the port to Portville, as was the case in an importation organised by a group in Montreal that repeatedly used the port of Vancouver instead as it was considered less risky for them. By looking at cases in Genoa and NYC - and the importations in the cities that do not arrive in the port – we can suggest that this might become relevant also when looking beyond the Portvilles of this paper. The nature of the trade into a certain port might yield increased use of certain routes; but the geographical surroundings of the port will influence the way the port is policed: the risks of the latter might neutralise the benefits of the former.

The key skill to importation, therefore, is not in the ability to organise scripts, but rather the opposite, in the ability to improvise, to adapt, to find new or alternative doors, to strengthen the existing doors while, obviously, trusting the right people for the job (Zaitch, 2005).

## **Policing of drug importation at the port: vulnerabilities, displacement and breakwaters**

Portville is a complex environment to police. In most cases, even if the port sits within the city's premises, there will be special units/forces to handle the port territory. With the exception of Liverpool, which is private, the port is usually public land, and might be either federal or national – seldom municipal - while private actors are usually leasing the land or managing it (landlord ports).

There are numerous institutional eyes tasked with policing drug importations and distribution in Portville, as shared before, but their interaction is often the result of competing agendas and overlapping strategies, across local, national and (when available) federal interests (Brewer, 2014).

### ***Borders or Urban Areas?***

One of the main challenges of policing, preventing and disrupting drug importation through the port is the ambivalent nature of its territory. For a local port police, the port is a neighbourhood, a section of the urban space:

“What we do here is neighbourhood policing at its best. Like alarms going off, someone misses their wallet, traffic is congested and we keep it moving. We have a high-visibility patrolling schedule, which acts as deterrent for anything out of the order in this area”.

Conversely, for state/federal police units with a specific mandate against drugs through the port, the waterfront is a border zone:

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“We handle matters of national security and our presence at the port is very important, because we are dealing with inbound and outbound containers, it’s a matter of controlling what gets in and what gets out (...) Drug trafficking and drug importation, these are forcing the borders. It’s not just about us, it’s about our allies outside too.”

In investigations to disrupt organised crime and importation of drugs to Portville, the port is both a transit and a target; it is seen as both territory where business affairs are arranged and criminal equilibriums are maintained as well as a ‘door’ to be exploited for new ventures and occasions. It has been argued, by an analyst in a city police force in Portville, that:

“The port moves slower than the city, the criminal equilibrium in the port is more static, things move less quickly, which seems counterintuitive if you think about it. It might be because... sure, the port is an entry point for drugs, a door - one of the doors to Portville - but also a gated territory in its own right”.

***Risk Assessments and Targets***

In Portville the indicative amount of containers that are routinely checked in the port counts for 2-5% of the overall traffic, notwithstanding the attempt to improve scanning requirements and policies (Nguyen, 2012). Before importations reach the port, border forces and state/federal law enforcement agencies rely on risk assessment and

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4 intelligence-led policing to balance out policing duties of confiscation and seizures with  
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6 smoothness of trades and mobility. According to a Border Agency officer:  
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11 “In ports, in airports, there are choices to make: facilitation vs border protection.  
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13 And guess what overrides the other? No one likes to wait at the border,  
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15 passengers or ships. People complain about increased security, it slows things  
16  
17 down (...) Very good intelligence then becomes crucial, but it’s very often very  
18  
19 detached from the field. The more security you want, the more risks you are  
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21 going to miss”.  
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27 From the side of state/federal police forces or border agencies, therefore, relying  
28  
29 on good risk assessments suits a subtler approach to security, which supports trade and  
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31 productivity rather than becoming an added cost or a burden. There is often a status quo,  
32  
33 a threshold that custom agencies in Portville do not cross; eventually *“it might be best*  
34  
35 *to confiscate less drugs, as confiscating too much makes it look like we are not*  
36  
37 *protecting the borders, confiscating too less looks like we are getting stuff go through”*,  
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39 explains a border agent.  
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44 Risk assessments models process intelligence tips, whenever such information  
45  
46 does not lead to a specific action at the port. Vulnerabilities identified for organised  
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48 crime to exploit in the port are usually based on Consequence/Probability matrixes  
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50 where risk is the product of matching likelihood (from rare to almost certain) and  
51  
52 consequences (from very low to very high). Information is rated according to ratings  
53  
54 based on analysis of issues, control mechanisms and mitigating strategies to reduce the  
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56 risk already in place.  
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Intelligence-led policing is not just a prerogative and a technique for high policing agencies, as also city police forces on the ground collect information, process it and call judgements upon it especially against organised crime (CENTREX, 2007). Targets in drug importation might vary when considering analyses from police forces and investigators at different levels of authority in Portville. Importations can be arranged by anyone at any stage: in this sense they are unsystematic and spontaneous. Distribution networks and 'doors' are socially embedded in the fabric of Portville and surrounding areas. Indeed, while importation runs on opportunities also outside of Portville, different groups (i.e. mafia groups, Hells Angels, street gangs) control distribution in the city, either by areas of influence or by commodity. When distribution is less controlled and reaches out beyond the city's premises, police observe internal fights or feuds across groups, which usually lead to immediate repressive responses. Obviously, if importation is mostly unsystematic and distribution is mostly controlled, access and management of 'doors' represent the most obvious vulnerabilities, thus challenges for policing and security institutions.

### ***Main challenges and vulnerabilities***

As there is no way to stop drugs from coming in, policing agencies' most problematic task is to understand that when a 'door' is closed another one will open, much like a system of communicating vessels. The main challenges and vulnerabilities have to do on the one hand, with the human factor, and on the other hand, with the clogging of security mechanisms.



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4 A peculiarity of Portville is the existence, in specific historical moments, of a  
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6 clear nexus between the port workers and organised crime, for what used to be ‘old  
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8 days’ scenarios of dockers opening the cargos, stealing and/or running labour  
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10 racketeering at the port. (Leloup, 2019). There are historical investigations in  
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12 Melbourne on the Union of Painters and Dockers in the 1980s, while New York City  
13  
14 and Montreal have seen stories of involvement of organised crime and mafia-type  
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16 criminality with the International Longshoremen Association or the Checkers Union.  
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18 Portville’s reputation seems always linked to port dockers with bad reputation. But  
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20 today, the challenge is not that port workers might steal or might facilitate drug  
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22 importation in person and within port premises, but the opposite: the fear is that  
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24 whoever works at the port knows the system enough to circumvent it. The challenge is  
25  
26 double-sided: on one side there is an attempt to control individual access (including  
27  
28 employees), for example by issuing (and revoking) ID cards on the basis of (often  
29  
30 intrusive) clearance plans by Port Authorities or Home Affairs or Transport Ministries.  
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32 On the other side, it has become obvious that the employees’ involvement to the overall  
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34 job of drug importation has become rarer, also because of such controls. The challenge,  
35  
36 or rather the vulnerability, lies in understanding where and if these contributions still  
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38 exist. It is, indeed, “*not a matter of your job but a matter of what function you have in*  
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40 *the port*” as commented by a city police officer. A Security Manager in the Port  
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42 Authority comments:  
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52 “I am not saying that drugs don’t arrive anymore with the help of insiders, of  
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54 course we are only humans and people can have different motivations. What we  
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56 can say is that, with all the obstacles in place, the monitoring, the ID Checks, the  
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4 advance information we have on every person and every vehicle, whoever, in a  
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6 function of supporting organised crime outside the port, claims ‘control’ over the  
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8 docks, what is it that they can exactly do? They can keep an eye on the  
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10 container? Yes. They can secure it from inspection? To a certain extent. What  
11  
12 they can do, realistically, is to sell information on how we work, they sell their  
13  
14 knowledge of the port economy and how to use the supply chain, not to bring  
15  
16 things in the port, but to actually get them out. The problem is to get things out  
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18 as if they were not illegal, you see?”  
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25 The challenge of monitoring access therefore is paired with the vulnerability of  
26  
27 learning about the port economy, which remains quite obscure for people outside the  
28  
29 field, and therefore becomes valuable information to be sold. Indeed, that corruption  
30  
31 and traffic of information remains the main challenge and vulnerability for policing and  
32  
33 security agencies in Portville, is confirmed by the attempts of some authorities to  
34  
35 investigate and gather intelligence on companies, as well as individuals, for redacting a  
36  
37 list of ‘trusted insiders’ who pass what essentially is an integrity and legality set of tests.  
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39 This is considered the elephant in the room, in as much as every authority in Portville  
40  
41 knows that the problem with importation of drugs in the port is not finalised *in* the port  
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43 but *through* the port and therefore *outside* it. It becomes, therefore, a matter of  
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45 corruption of officers at the border, or other port authority employees in as much as  
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47 their ‘function’ is helpful to gain an advantage of what matters in the importation:  
48  
49 getting a knowledge advantage and evading controls. Notwithstanding the growing  
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51 levels of automation of port shipment handling and the increasing dependence of port  
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53 terminals on technologically advanced machinery, this is not going to change that  
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4 easily. Indeed, the possibilities to hijack technology and sell information also leads to  
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6 increased investments in cyber security protocols by port terminals.  
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9       Very often border, police and security forces in the port undertake both law  
10 enforcement and custom duties (Côté-Boucher, 2016). This discretion in power could be  
11 exploited together with individual vulnerabilities. However – and this translates into  
12 another challenge - increased controls to spot individual responsibility (maybe due to  
13 financial hardship of officers) are not necessarily helping in improving officers' and  
14 agents' morale or faith in their own institution. Finally, having a 'door' through the port  
15 can essentially mean finding someone in a useful function, corruptible for a myriad of  
16 different reasons as much as it can mean learning from these persons how to use the  
17 supply chain to 'fake' legitimate trade and go unnoticed through the port  
18 system/economy.  
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### 36 **Pac-Man in Portville: Implications and Conclusion**

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41       Increasing securitisation of ports is unlikely to have effects on the drug markets  
42 beyond those of displacement, as already advanced by critiques to the application of  
43 situational crime prevention techniques for organised crime disruption (Von Lampe,  
44 2011). The growing mobility of goods, that brings into question the neo-liberal turn of  
45 cultures of capital (Bartilow and Eom, 2009), the clear push towards free trade and the  
46 subservient politics of transnational governance and security to the needs of  
47 consumerism (Eski, 2019) are drivers of the drugs market; as such they need to be  
48 addressed further in assessing the effects of securitisation of policing of ports in the  
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4 fight against trafficking and importation of drugs. Eventually, the rules of trade and the  
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6 needs to obey the neo-liberal turn of cultures of capital, is what affects the success of  
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8 drug importation the most, and not the failures of security.  
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11 Indeed, the relation between offenders and law enforcement authorities for  
12  
13 complex criminal scenarios has been at times defined as a ‘cat-and-mouse game’  
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15 (Ryder, 2008; Braithwaite, 2002), to indicate the constant struggle of the police to  
16  
17 pursue offenders and the ability of offenders to escape capture. More than cat-and-  
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19 mouse, however, policing and securing the port from drug importation has become a  
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21 game of Pac-Mac: not only the two ‘factions’ run from one another, but obstacles  
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23 appear where there was nothing before, forcing detours and reversing roles on who  
24  
25 chases whom, and there is a constant readjusting to new realities even within familiar  
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27 ‘walls’. Mechanisms assumed to generate preventive effects in organised complex  
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29 crime, attempting to have discouraging effects of the presence of others, do not seem to  
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31 work under all circumstances: mixed effects and displacement can be expected  
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33 (Vijlbrief, 2012).  
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39 This is because every security system and policing method in place becomes  
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41 surmountable in the very moment it loses its novelty and becomes habit. “*Habit*”,  
42  
43 reminds a Port Facility Security Officer of a Portville terminal, “*is enemy of security*”.  
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45 As perfectly encapsulated by a Border/Custom Officer:  
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51 “Sometimes things can even happen under your nose, you might watch someone  
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53 taking out drugs, or anything, from a container, with the police or us watching,  
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55 and you don’t even notice. As they [offenders] know how we operate, they know  
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4 how to slip away. Truth is we are too predictable. They know the way we  
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6 operate”.

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11 This is also the opinion of all Terminal Security Officers, one of whom notices  
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13 that:

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18 “The moment you invest in new technology, new systems, new organisational  
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20 tactics you have some results in curbing misbehaviours. But it doesn’t last, then  
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22 all becomes habit, people learn how to get around anything”.

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27 This is also linked to the fact that it is not just the security landscape, but also the  
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29 space of terminals and the gated port environment that are built with a design that is  
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31 meant to enforce situational crime prevention (Bullock et al., 2010). Building obstacles,  
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33 creating access points, monitoring movements might not solve the whole crime  
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35 typology (i.e. organised crime and drug importation). Nevertheless, it might deter  
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37 offenders enough to have diffused benefits on the targeted problem (less drug  
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39 importation through the port) and displace other activities instead (new ways to import  
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41 drugs).

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45 Predictability of crime prevention and repression techniques work against their  
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47 intended purposes in the long run. In Portville, drug importation through the port – up  
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49 until recently clearly favouring containers and large quantities of drugs arriving through  
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51 cargo shipments - has been displaced thanks to increased security at the port. The ‘job’  
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53 is now showing a growing trend towards *diffusion*, *dilution* and *fragmentation* of  
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55 shipments. Still coming from the water, smaller vessels, boats, submarines, and yachts  
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are now the privileged means, as they can dock more often and to smaller (and less patrolled) ports, or be intercepted (by criminal associates) in open waters. This type of dilution and fragmentation is more difficult to predict, differently from the main seaports' cargo paths, where – as said - the illegal must still move on the legal routes.

The predictability of security, policing and custom controls, as much as the scripted nature of maritime trades, and the pushes to increase the flows, moved drug importation outside of the port. Not only importers through the port now use the supply chain to ensure drugs exit the port premises seemingly legally, but also organised crime governance at the port has been reconfigured from what used to be 'criminal/mafia power' on the docks. Indeed, it has become a 'user' service, providing protection, logistics support and specialist knowledge of maritime trades and protocols. This, however, does not mean that old logics of power by organised crime in the port have died: indeed, as said, organised crime in the port moves slower than in Portville, as the port is 'protected', 'gated': things inside change, but newcomers cannot come in, as old practices tend to crystallise.

In today's drug trade to Portville - where virtually everyone can import but very few are autonomous in distribution - the port acts as both a *door* and a *breakwater*: it changes the way drugs get in but also changes the flux and the stream of importations. The complicated security field of the port demands compliance and convergence and punishes defiance and nonconformity: the question remains, can you really force changes in criminal behaviour, by increasing compliance activities? While it is unquestionable that crime on the waterfront has been deeply changed by security observance, the nature, volume and rationale for drug importation have not changed.

Becoming more unpredictable in the face of compliance, and allowing a higher degree of uncertainty on gated areas, might lead to a perceived loss of control, but eventually it might yearn more order. Unpredictability and uncertainty mirror criminal markets more than their opposite: this will allow police, customs and law enforcement in Portville to see, touch and maybe get an advantage in understanding how the door of the port actually works for illegal trafficking. It might reduce fragmentation and dilution of the drug market for importation, as much as it might also reduce the quest for finding new and alternative doors, including those in the legal economy and supply chain of trade through the port.

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